

CHAPTER FIVE

TEXT/IMAGE

The previous three chapters focused on the imagery at Great Buddha Bend and included analysis of the function of the inscribed texts as found within the six narrative tableaux. First considered was how text was utilized in conjunction with the carved images, i.e., text and image. Two main approaches to text and image were discovered. The first, a utilization of the text to simply describe what was also being depicted three-dimensionally; and the second, the use of an inscribed text to provide information above and beyond what was sculpturally portrayed. This latter approach allows for a reading of the images themselves as a kind of hyper-text, best illustrated in the conscious decision to sculpturally emphasize one particular episode over another within a given inscribed storyline. In her survey of Buddhist scripture, Levering outlines four basic modes of reception for text: informative mode, transactive mode, transformative mode, and symbolic mode.¹ The above two utilizations of text at Baodingshan would be categorized as falling into her “informative mode”, texts which shape one’s understanding of a tradition.²

Apart from this understanding of the text as a counterpart to the imagery is the awareness that not all of the text at the site worked within this

¹Levering, 59.

construct. Ritual use of text is hinted at by repetitive placement of at least one inscribed phrase, "Even if a red-hot iron wheel rotated on the top of my head, I would not, because of this suffering, give up the mind of enlightenment" as previously discussed in Chapter 2. Levering would place ritual use of text within the "transactive" and "transformative" modes of reception, meaning to use words "to act in the power of the ultimate, to encounter the Other, or to transform the self."³ Ritual use in turn belies a third possibility for the extensive use of text at Great Buddha Bend – text as image. This is the fourth mode of textual reception conceived of by Levering, the "symbolic mode". The symbolic mode of reception "find(s) that word or text can be itself a symbol of the ultimate."⁴

In the following section, I will consider text as image not within the rubric of aesthetics, but as a socio-historical concern which predicated the need for the extensive amounts of text found inscribed at Baodingshan. Beginning with a brief theoretical discussion of text as image within both aesthetic and religious realms, I will then put forward rationale as to how the political climate of twelfth-century Sichuan coupled with religious precedence predisposed Zhao Zhifeng to incorporate such copious amounts of textual imagery into the design of the site.

²Ibid., 60.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Text as Image in Theory

Historically, writing and authority in China have been inextricably intertwined. From the very earliest times, written texts have been perceived with a mixture of awe and fear by the illiterate, those who demonstrated a mastery of text being viewed as magicians in charge of divine intervention. "Writing was known by all to be significant, but its significance was known only to the few."⁵ As time passed and literacy grew, some of this magical quality diminished, but reverence for the power of the written word clearly did not. The Chinese received Buddhist texts within an established tradition of placing great value upon and preserving the written classics, from which the term *jing* was taken to stand for the Buddhist Sanskrit term "*sutra*" translated here as "scripture", denoting such works in effect as Buddhist written classics.⁶ The carving of Buddhist scriptures over the centuries in large letters on smoothed-off cliff-faces, in a direct link between the humans below and the heavens above, is yet another example of the enduring mystical aura of the written word.⁷

Analysis of the written word within the field of Chinese art history has focused largely on the aesthetics of the text, be it the random thoughts of a scholar in exile scrawled in ink on paper, or an imperial edict inscribed in

⁵Mark Edward Lewis, Writing and Authority in Early China (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999): 3.

⁶J.W. De Jong, Buddha's Word in China (Canberra: Australian National University, 1968).

⁷Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, Written on Bamboo and Silk (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962): 72.

stone.⁸ At Baodingshan the artistic quality of the inscribed text is not the issue. No one calligrapher is credited with the inscribed scriptural works, and therefore, we can postulate that the aesthetic of the individual characteristics of the textual inscriptions was not an important factor to Zhao Zhifeng for mitigating the inclusion of text at Great Buddha Bend. The texts are carved *intaglio* in very readable *kai shu* or standard calligraphic script, a style preferable for the two predominant activities at the site: pedagogy and prayer.⁹ Rather than discuss the textual imagery at Great Buddha Bend from the theoretical juncture of aesthetics on a calligraphic level, it is more relevant to consider the aesthetics of the inscribed scriptures as a whole: as blocks of text whose presence within the tableaux should be equated with the pictorially carved imagery.

Text is a major component within all of the six narrative tableaux previously discussed (fig. 160). One has only to watch the modern-day foreign tourist poring over the site to see how the eye is constantly drawn to the large blocks of text, regardless of whether or not they are comprehensible to the viewer. Murray notes,

Because writing has held high prestige in China from ancient times onward, the juxtaposition of the written word was not considered a distraction from the

⁸Within the realm of Western language studies of Chinese calligraphy, numerous examples can be cited. The most recent work is the catalogue *The Embodied Image*, Robert E. Harrist Jr. and Wen Fong eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁹Chaves, 210, quotes a Qing dynasty writer, You Tong (1618-1704 CE) as stating the belief that standard script should be the norm for Buddhist texts because other calligraphic styles were inappropriate, being considered too “playful” for such serious matters. There are only a few exceptions to the standard script at Baodingshan, most notably within the large character inscriptions found in connection with the Cave of Complete Enlightenment and the Vairocana niche.

pictorial image. In fact, the presence of writing would have elevated the merely pictorial by bringing it firmly into alignment with the high cultural tradition.¹⁰

In their very arrangement within the sculpted narrative works, the inscribed scriptures and captions demand the viewer's attention. In many ways, the inscriptions at Great Buddha Bend display not the beauty of the line of an individual Chinese character, but rather the beauty of the blank page with even lines of script dancing across it. They cannot be ignored, the power of their presence contributing to a type of visual patterning or rhythm within each of the carved tableaux.¹¹

Given that this textual imagery was part of Zhao Zhifeng's original plan for the grotto, the engraved scriptures at Great Buddha Bend need to be viewed as equals to the carvings that surround them. As such, the inscribed texts become sacred objects unto themselves, not merely textual clarification for the more obvious icons. As Judith Berling notes in her analysis of genre writing within the Hinayana and Mahayana traditions, "Another feature of the Mahayana sutras is the stress they place on the merit of the sutra itself."¹² Mahayana being the form of Buddhism dominant in China, Berling cites the

¹⁰Murray, "Buddhism and Early Narrative Illustration in China", 19.

¹¹The inscriptions at Great Buddha Bend were clearly part of Zhao Zhifeng's original design. This type of incorporation of text is not unique to the site – most other Buddhist sites incorporate text in the form of dedicatory inscriptions – nor is it unique to China. John Sparrow in *Visible Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969): 58, elaborates on European architects including inscriptions in their original designs as early as the 15th century. Among other sites in China where carved texts are present, Xiangtangshan is the only site where the use of text as image within an overall sculptural program has been found. Even so, only a very few caves at the Xiangtangshan site reflect a coherent synthesis of the two, as noted by Mino, 177-180, and none are truly narrative in construct.

Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma as just one example of this new Chinese emphasis on the text itself. It is propounded in the Lotus that since the scripture is in fact the very “body” of the Buddha those who revere the Buddhist scriptures will be duly rewarded; likewise, any who dare to sully or defame the sacred text will suffer dire consequences.¹³ Moreover, a sutra itself can become a character within a narrative’s dramatic structure, thereby shifting the power of the Buddhist law from the actual personage of the Buddha to the texts he passed along.¹⁴ Levering supports this contention by pointing out that in these early scriptures, “there is an extraordinary emphasis on the importance and status of the sutra, tending toward an orientation toward the text that can be termed ‘iconic’.”¹⁵

By extension, scriptural works could be seen as embodiments of the Buddha himself as reflected in the practice of inserting texts into the body cavities of iconic imagery, in effect equating the text with the relic bones of the Buddha. In her work on the Northern Qi cave complex at Xiangtangshan, Mino furthers this inherent correlation between Buddhist texts and Buddhist relics. Mino points to scriptures being enshrined in or inscribed on reliquaries rather than only on or inside iconic imagery throughout China.¹⁶

¹²Berling, 66.

¹³Ibid. Campany devotes an entire section of his article to the inviolability of Buddhist texts, and the horrible punishments that await those who do so transgress. See Robert F. Campany, “Notes on the Devotional Uses and Symbolic Functions of Sutra Texts as Depicted in Early Chinese Buddhist Miracle Tales and Hagiographies” in The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies vol. 14 no. 1 (1991): 40-43.

¹⁴Berling, 67.

¹⁵Levering, 61.

¹⁶Mino, 191-197.

Mino then utilizes this aspect of the text as sacred object to further her argument that the Xiangtangshan caves need to be viewed as reliquaries.¹⁷

The significance of the text as relic and object of veneration is important within the Baodingshan site as well, although there is no reason to view the site as one large reliquary. Numerous images of pagodas, the Chinese version of the Indian *stupa* utilized as the original reliquary of the historical Buddha's remains, grace both Great Buddha Bend and Little Buddha Bend, with one pagoda image placed immediately to the left of the large tableau depicting the bodhisattvas of the Huayan Sutra inscribed with the epitaph, "Holy Relic Pagoda". Other pagoda images appear to the left of the 1000-armed Guanyin image, and within the hell tableau at Great Buddha Bend, not to mention the relic pagoda erected for the Buddha's father included in the tableau depicting the Buddha's Repayment of Kindness. The cult of the relic was clearly alive and well in twelfth-century Sichuan, evidence of relic worship being the inscription found in Little Buddha Bend describing the arrival of a famous Buddha bone at Baodingshan.¹⁸ Although any actual physical remains appear to be long gone from the Baodingshan site, the textual relics remain as testament to the enduring power of the word over the object. In this sense, the metaphysical relics of the Buddha supercede the physical ones.

¹⁷Ibid., 202-256.

¹⁸See DZSKYJ, 275-276 for the original text of the inscribed passage, and pages 60 - 62 of chapter two of this work for discussion of this text within the larger context of Baodingshan. References to *sarira* or relics are also carved front and center within the Repayment of Kindness tableau, placed directly behind the area where one would place

Within the Lotus and the Perfection of Wisdom Scripture the reader is in effect told that the scriptural texts or metaphysical relics are *more* worthy of offerings and reverence than the actual physical relics of the Buddha, since the truth these texts propound and the ritual training they outline is the source from which all Buddhas come.¹⁹ This can be seen as well in the miraculous tales of the survival of scriptural works regardless of natural or man-made disaster, the texts themselves embodying the superior power of the Buddhist doctrine.²⁰ This belief in the miraculous qualities of texts came to be taken quite literally, as in the case quoted by Jonathan Chaves in which eleventh-century Chinese worshippers to a Buddhist temple scraped off bits of the painted scriptures in the belief that ingesting the ink could cure them.²¹

The mere presence of Buddhist texts was sufficient to merit their worship. Rarely are the protagonists in the numerous stories surrounding the scriptures described as reading them or engaged in practices involving their content.²² Rightful possession of Buddhist texts further guaranteed posthumous rewards, again regardless of any actual use of the text.²³ At Great Buddha Bend, the sutras are not family treasures such as those described by Campany, but public ones. Like their private counterparts, they

offerings. The inscribed text reads, "Only my master has golden bones, and (although) having been refined by fire 100 times, the colors are still fresh."

¹⁹Leon Hurvitz, Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976): 288, and Edward Conze, The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its Verse Summary (Bollingen: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973): 266-267.

²⁰Campany, 43.

²¹Chaves, 210.

²²Campany, 35.

were worthy of worship and reverence. Since the display of sacred texts alone was considered an avenue for gaining merit, the inscribed texts at Great Buddha Bend need also be viewed as perpetual sources of good karma for the visiting worshippers and resident monastic community alike, their display being an eternal and permanent one, differing in this respect from the more fragile privately-owned scriptural works of paper or silk.

Clearly the texts envisioned in these examples go beyond an understanding of the sutras as simply representing the sacred words of the *dharma*. The texts are instead perceived and utilized as one would a sacred image. Robert Campany notes that even in the pre-Tang era, copies of sacred texts were viewed as variant manifestations of the Buddha, with believers making offerings to the texts that ranged from simple reverence to bodily mutilation.²⁴ This phenomenon was not relegated to only the early stages of Buddhist belief in China. In his study on Song dynasty Buddhist commemorative stele, Mark Halperin observes that:

scripture also remained an object of veneration in some Sung accounts. Although “not setting up written works” ranked among the best-known of Ch’an slogans, and the semi-vernacular ‘lamp histories’ and recorded sayings’ literature became prime sources of Buddhist learning, monasteries continued to build sutra treasuries, and the word of Buddha never lost its pride of place.²⁵

²³Campany quoting from Michel Strickmann, “The Mao Shan Revelations: Taoism and the Aristocracy,” *Toung Pao* vol. 63 (1977): 28-30.

²⁴Campany, 35.

²⁵Halperin, 114 -115.

Over the centuries a tension would be expressed by various sects over the relative importance of “words” as well as images within the Buddhist faith, with some sects arguing for the sanctity of the written *dharma* while others viewed words as equally insufficient in expressing the ultimate Buddhist “truth”.²⁶ Yet given the melding of both text and image within the grotto at Great Buddha Bend, this issue does not appear to have been a concern for Zhao Zhifeng and those involved in the design and construction of the Baodingshan site.

If in the mind’s eye of the worshipper the written scriptural word carried at least the same weight as the carved Buddhist image, then an entirely new vision of the tableaux at Great Buddha Bend emerges. In order to envision what import this equating of the scriptural text with the Buddha himself had in the mindset of a twelfth-century worshipper, I have replaced the textual portions of the six tableaux at Baodingshan with iconic images of a seated Buddha in meditation taken from elsewhere at Great Buddha Bend (fig. 161).²⁷ The visual impression this creates is quite striking. Still symmetrically arranged, the figure of the Buddha *as text* now dominates each tableau. In this new understanding, the interchangeability of text and image makes them clearly equals, the imagery no longer dominating the text, the

²⁶Levering, 63.

²⁷This is a case of expedient means since in the field of art history, we have an “image bias”, tending to look at the image first, and then the text. The surrounding carved imagery could just as easily have been replaced with text in order to demonstrate the importance of the textual presence at Great Buddha Bend.

text not subservient to the image. The two are in essence one and the same, representations of the Buddha.

Text as Image in Twelfth-Century Sichuan

One could easily argue that Great Buddha Bend's unique combination of text and image were a result of the site's position in time and place. The long-standing belief was that Sichuan, being at a far-remove from more metropolitan areas, and the later Song dynasty construction dates, being post-Tang dynasty, long touted as the high point of Buddhist activity in China, were responsible for Baodingshan's idiosyncratic artistic style.²⁸ I believe a consideration of time and place is indeed essential to an understanding of the unique aspects of the Baodingshan site, but rather than view the site through a very wide-angle lens which incorporates all of China, it is more useful to focus in on the situation taking place specifically in Sichuan province and Dazu County prior to and during the construction of the grotto. Aside from the individual benefits to be accrued from the use of the Baodingshan site, what religious impetus could there have been for having a set iconographic program with such large amounts of textual imagery? One factor may have been the loss of the northern half of China to the Jurchen in 1125 CE, and the

²⁸I here reiterate the sentiments so succinctly put forward by Victor Segalen at the turn of the twentieth century. See *The Great Statuary of China*, trans. Eleanor LeVieux (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

following incursions of marauding bands of first the Jurchen, and then the Mongols, into Sichuan province beginning as early as 1131 CE.²⁹

There are two components to this portion of the equation. One is that the Mongols were perceived as vicious, destructive “barbarians”, and within the Southern Song mindset, the end of the world as they knew it appeared to be at hand.³⁰ Although the Mongols under the subsequent Yuan dynasty came to be known as great admirers of Buddhism and of the written word, little was known about them by the Chinese people prior to their takeover of the empire as a whole. The literature that survives from the Song describes a distinct distrust of this unlettered, nomadic people who still engaged in shamanic rituals.³¹ Some Southern Song scholars presciently noted that perhaps it would be better to continue to pay tribute to a known enemy, the Jurchen, than to delve into the unknown with a war allying the Mongols and the Chinese against the Jurchen.³²

²⁹Winston W. Lo, *Szechwan in Sung China: A Case Study in the Political Integration of the Chinese Empire*, (Taipei: University of Chinese Culture Press, 1982): 37-38. It must be remembered that the construction dates given for Baodingshan are approximately 1179-1249 CE.

³⁰For an overview of Southern Song sentiments regarding the Mongols as described in the personal memoirs of various Southern Song officials, see Charles A. Peterson, “First Sung Reaction to the Mongol Invasion of the North, 1211-17” in *Crisis and Prosperity in Sung China*, 215-254. John Winthrop Haeger, ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975).

³¹Thomas Francis Carter, *The Invention of Printing in China*, revised by L. Carrington Goodrich (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955): 88, discusses how it was only after the Yuan dynasty was firmly established that Chinghis Khan employed scholars to turn the spoken Uighur language into writing.

³²Peterson, 250, notes that scholars’ feelings were mixed with regard to using the Mongols to rid the Song of paying tribute to the Jurchen, “the satisfaction at seeing an ancient enemy (the Jurchen) come under attack (by the Mongols) did not equal the anxiety felt over whether the chaos might lead.” In 1234 CE, the Southern Song court allied with the Mongols to rid the north of China of the Jurchen. See Jennifer Jay, *A Change in Dynasties* (Bellingham, WA: Western Washington Press, 1991) for an extensive overview of the events leading up to the eventual takeover of China by the Mongols.

To the people of China, no distinction was made between the various bands of invaders. The vast majority of literature fails to differentiate between the Jurchen and the Mongols, and the most commonly used term appears to have been the generic “barbarian”.³³ In 1196 CE, well before the 1221 CE first official contact between the Chinese court and a Mongolian emissary, concerns were being raised by Chinese officials that the Mongol attacks on the Jurchen borders to the north belied an intention to continue their conquest down into what remained of the Chinese empire.³⁴ Jay notes that anxiety brought about by the continued barbarian presence on the northern borders was seen as one rationale for why men of merit were reluctant to commit themselves to positions with the state during the Southern Song, with requests by officials to retire from public service at an all-time high.³⁵

The 1179-1249 CE construction dates of Baodingshan’s Great Buddha Bend fall well within these uncertain times; in fact, by 1235 the Mongols had entered Dazu County, and by 1259 they had seized control of Sichuan’s ten major cities.³⁶ A stele dated to 1247 CE and preserved at the Buddhist site of Nanshan in Dazu County recounts the atmosphere which prevailed among those Chinese who remained in the area after the Mongols arrival:

³³Peterson, 223.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Jay, 25.

³⁶With regard to the 1259 date, see Richard L. Davis, *Wind Against the Mountain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996): 34. For more on the Mongol occupation of Sichuan, see Chen Shisong, *Menggu ding Shu shi gao (Historical Texts on the Mongol Settlement of Shu)* (Chengdu: Sichuan sheng shi hui ke xue yuan chu ban she, 1985).

Those living (in Dazu County) turned and moved on to another place. The scholars withdrew from state and local governance, not only indifferent but also (somewhat) approving. (The Mongols) encircled us for 1000 *li* like so many thorny trees!³⁷

From this contemporary account, it becomes apparent that the sentiments of the local populace ran largely toward hopelessness and desperation. The scholars and any form of local governance had abandoned them, with those that could escaping the area prior to the Mongol takeover. For the unfortunate individuals who remained behind, the sense of urgency and ultimate doom had to be assuaged, and the Buddhist monastic communities were undoubtedly one source of relief for the Chinese populace.

The second aspect of this equation is connected to what must be seen as a conscious decision on the part of Zhao Zhifeng to carve, and thereby preserve, Buddhist texts in stone. Within the Buddhist realm, a time of chaos and destruction was scheduled to occur 2500 years after the Buddha's death, and the notion of the "latter days of the law" or *mofa* permeated Buddhist practice at various points throughout its history in China.³⁸ This is based on the Buddhist scripture *Mahasamnipata*, which foretells of the eventual decline of the Buddha's teachings, marked by five stages of 500 years each.³⁹ The last

³⁷Li Fangyin, *Dazu shi ke yi shu* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1990): 287 and DZSKMWL, 300.

³⁸*Mofa* translates literally to "end-dharma" or "final dharma". This term is not found in the texts relating the periodization of the Buddhist teachings, but rather is a product of Chinese commentaries and spurious sutras appearing around the 5th century CE. See Nattier, 90—99. The term *mo shi* or "final age" appears more frequently than *mofa* in translated Chinese works, Nattier 101-102. Nattier, 103, deems *mofa* "an "apocryphal word": a term created in China with no Indian antecedent."

³⁹Taisho volume 13 fascicle 397. An excellent discussion of Buddhist theories of time as well as theories of decline of the *dharma* can be found in Jan Nattier's work Once Upon a

stage would be an extremely troubled and chaotic time, with the final destruction of the Buddhist law occurring. At this time, the world would collapse into total ignorance of the Buddha's teachings. This chronology obviously lent itself to wide-ranging interpretation.⁴⁰ In Little Buddha Bend at Baodingshan, an inscription accompanying a Song dynasty stele devoted to the arrival of a relic of the historical Buddha, dates Shakyamuni's *parinirvana* to 2282 years earlier, effectively placing the construction of the site within the last of the five stages of the final days of the law.⁴¹

Such a time of cosmic chaos and uncertainty easily mirrored the real events occurring in the surrounding Sichuan countryside. In 1127 CE, the principal trade route connecting Sichuan with the rest of the empire was severed, a situation that again would last up until the Mongol takeover of China.⁴² Lo points out that between 1131 and the eventual Mongol takeover of China, local Sichuanese strongmen often had to save the day, or throw

Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991). Nattier, 28-42, notes that the earliest formulations for survival of the Buddhist teachings after the death of the historical Buddha were only 500 years in duration, this number reached in large part based upon the admittance of women into the monastic community. The number gradually grew to 2500 years as time passed, and appear to have gone through successive stages of 500 year increments within the Mahayana school, growing to a total of 10,000 years at one point in time. Nattier, 46-62. Nattier, 54-55, notes that the *Candragarbha* scripture contained a 2500-year plan, which was subsequently "read back" into the *Diamond* and *Lotus* scriptures by Chinese commentators, further perpetuating the 2500 year cycle, and by the sixth century, consensus on the duration of the Buddhist teachings had disappeared.

⁴⁰This is but one of several permutations appearing in several different Buddhist scriptures regarding the timing of the latter days of the law. These is one computation of three periods, the first 300 years, the second 1000, while the last is 10,000, and another of again three periods - 500, 1000, and 4 separate periods of 500 years each. I chose the five stages of five, since regardless of which formula is utilized, the author of the Song dynasty stele at Baodingshan would have known that he was living within the final period connected to the period of the decline of the Buddhist teachings.

⁴¹This stele is dated to 1218 CE. DZSKMWL, 192.

⁴²Von Glahn, 7.

their allegiance to the invading conqueror. Such was the case in 1207, when Wu Xi allied himself with the Jurchen emperor, thereby creating an autonomous state within Sichuan which lasted until 1231 when the Song court finally albeit briefly regained control of the province.⁴³

One formulation of earlier efforts to perpetuate the Buddha's teachings during times thought to be those of the "latter days of the law" was to launch extensive carving campaigns to "preserve the canon". As noted in a 572 CE inscription found at Xiangtangshan in Hebei province, stone was considered ideal for such an enterprise, "as silk scrolls can be spoiled, bamboo documents do not last, metal tablets are difficult to preserve, and parchment and paper are easily destroyed...."⁴⁴ The most elaborate attempt at preserving the Buddhist canon in stone was the immense project undertaken at Fangshan, located 75 kilometers southwest of Beijing, between the years 600 and 1100 CE.⁴⁵ Here more than 7145 stone steles were engraved with scriptures from the Buddhist canon (fig. 162).⁴⁶

Similar to the works found at Great Buddha Bend, not all of the scriptures carved at Fangshan are inscribed in their entirety. Unlike the Great

⁴³Lo, 37-38.

⁴⁴Mino, 156.

⁴⁵Although Fangshan represents the most extensive attempt to preserve Buddhist texts by carving them in stone, other sites have been identified within the same region and of the same era as also having extensive amounts of carved Buddhist works. See Zhongguo shu fa jia xie hui Shandong fen ji, *Bei chao mo yai ke jing yan jiu* (Jinan: Qi lu shu she, 1991).

⁴⁶For a complete history of the Fangshan works, see Lewis R. Lancaster, "The Rock Cut Canon in China: Findings at Fang-Shan" in *The Buddhist Heritage*, 143-156, ed. Tadeusz Skorupski. (Tring: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1989). A more recent art historical study of the site has been conducted by Lothar Ledderose, "Changing the Audience", unpublished paper. I would like to thank Dr. Ledderose for his help in providing me with a copy of his paper, and for leads to more information about the rock-cut canon tradition in China.

Buddha Bend inscriptions, the majority of the Fangshan texts were carved on movable, freestanding stele, the majority of which were eventually cached. The major exception to this rule is the program of scriptures carved inside the Leiyingdong (“Thunder Sound Cave”).⁴⁷ From historical inscriptions dating to the mid-seventh century also found at the Fangshan site, it is known that the original purpose of the project was to preserve the canon for posterity, the cleric in charge fearing an upcoming decline of the Buddhist law.⁴⁸ Outside of Fangshan, other early Buddhist sites also were thought to have incorporated copious inscribed texts due to feelings of anxiety over an approaching decline in Buddhism. Mino argues that Xiangtangshan is another example of a site where fears over the imminent collapse of the Northern Wei dynasty led to increased pressure to carve Buddhist texts at the site in order to preserve the faith.⁴⁹

The scriptures were all important to surviving such a disastrous time. Since Buddhist texts are in effect sourced back to the words of the historical Buddha and document his method of transforming the world, his teachings are the texts, and without the texts there would be no teaching, and therefore, no transformation, or enlightenment, could take place.⁵⁰ The Buddhist scriptures themselves emphasize that without their transmission, no future

⁴⁷Ledderose, 2.

⁴⁸Ledderose, 3-8. Numerous dedicatory inscriptions dating to later periods point to a more traditional merit-making rationale as well. See Lancaster, 148-149.

⁴⁹Mino, 189-190.

⁵⁰Levering, 64.

Buddhas would arise.⁵¹ In effect, Zhao Zhifeng, along with both the lay and monastic communities who participated in activities at Baodingshan, had a very dire imperative to ensure that the Mongol invaders did not succeed. A wholesale destruction of the Buddhist teachings would eliminate what was the very essence of their own possibility for enlightenment and subsequent salvation. Without texts there could be no teachings, and as such the inscribed texts at Great Buddha Bend became much more symbolically valuable than the carved images.

The sites of Fangshan and Xiangtangshan are at quite a physical as well as temporal remove from Baodingshan, and therefore can serve only as examples of the rock-cut sutra tradition as a whole. Yet in Sichuan Buddhist texts were also inscribed in stone, the best documented case being the works found at the Tang dynasty site of Wofo Yuan (“Temple of the Reclining Buddha”), in neighboring Anyue County (fig. 163).⁵² The Wofo Yuan, known for its large Parinirvana scene, includes at least one instance where text and image is combined within a niche, although the text at Wofo Yuan does not appear to be as closely conjoined in content to the images as is the case at

⁵¹See Hurvitz’s translation of the Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma, 178-179 .

⁵²See Hu Wenhe and Li Guanzhi, “Anyue Wofo gou Tang dai shi jing” (“The Tang Dynasty Rock Sutras of Anyue’s Wofo Ravine”) Sichuan wen wu no. 2 (1986): 20-25. Hu also footnotes at least one other area within the province, Lingyanshan in Guan County, with rock-cut sutras there also dating to the Tang dynasty. See Hu, “Guan xian Ling yan shan Tang dai shi jing” (The Tang Dynasty Rock Sutras of Guan County’s Lingyanshan”) Sichuan wen wu no. 2 (1984): 33-35. For more on sutra inscriptions dating to the Tang and found in areas outside of Sichuan province, see Chang Qing’s Binxian Da fo si zao xiang yi shu (Iconic Art of the Great Buddha Temple in Binxian) (Beijing: Xian dai chu ban she, 1998) and Ding Mingyi’s article “Gongxian Tianlong Xiangtang Anyang shu chu shi ku si” (“The Numerous Rock Cave Temples of Tianlong, Xiangtang, and Anyang in Gong County”) in Zhong guo mei shu quan ji diao su bian, vol. 13 (Beijing: Zhongguo mei shu chu ban she, 1985): 26-51.

Great Buddha Bend.⁵³ The texts at Wofu Yuan are mainly inscribed sutras, some of which are similar to those found at Great Buddha Bend (fig. 164).⁵⁴ Approximately 45 separate inscribed texts are found carved in 15 different niches scattered throughout the Wofu Yuan site, with multiple sutras being carved in any one given niche. The two sutras which are also found inscribed at Great Buddha Bend include the Scripture on the Repayment of the Kindness of Parents, which is found in sections in three different niches at Wofu Yuan, and the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents, which is found in only one niche.⁵⁵ What connects these texts at Wofu Yuan with preservation of the canon efforts such as that seen at Fangshan is the presence of a carved list of sutras or sutra catalogue at the Wofu Yuan site.⁵⁶ This sutra catalogue can be found in cave number 46, along with a preface to the Tang Buddhist canon which dates to the seventh century.⁵⁷

Like Wofu Yuan, Baodingshan also has an inscribed sutra catalogue, carved around the four sides of the lowest level of the “Founder’s Pagoda” located in Little Buddha Bend (fig. 165).⁵⁸ Baodingshan’s sutra catalogue is

⁵³The example in question is the Wofu Yuan niche in which the Usnisavijaya Sutra is inscribed. Many thanks to Dr. Sørensen, 9/02/01 personal correspondence, for this information.

⁵⁴See Hu et al, 21-23. Dedicatory inscriptions are also found carved at the Wofu Yuan site.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Henrik Sørensen, A Survey of the Religious Sculptures of Anyue (Copenhagen: East Asian Institute, University of Copenhagen, 1989): 8. The titles of the sutras did not always appear in “lists” per se. At another Song dynasty site, that of the Peacock King Cave in nearby Anyue County, the roundel ends of the stone beams of the pagoda are carved with only titles of scriptures from the canon, perhaps implying the ritual use of the names alone. I’d like to thank Dr. Sørensen for sharing this information with me via personal correspondence, April 2001.

⁵⁷SCDJFJSKS, 63-64, with a table of all of the inscribed sutras on pages 66-69.

⁵⁸DZSKMWL, 170-184.

comprised of a list of 510 scriptures, beginning on the north side with the title “The Buddha Preached the 12 Divisions of the Canon”, (*“Fo shuo shi er bu da zang jing”*), and continuing around the base of the pagoda and onto the upper three tiers with a consecutive listing of sutras by name only (fig. 166).⁵⁹

The notion of carving the “twelve divisions”, or in essence the entire Buddhist canon, is also mentioned in the Fangshan historical inscriptions.⁶⁰ What is thought to have been the rationale behind this original vow was not to carve the works in their entirety, but rather to choose representative portions of each to carve. Ledderose notes that although a representative sample may have been the original intention of Jingwan, the cleric in charge of the work at Fangshan, the idea of engraving the “twelve divisions” began to be implemented quite literally when subsequent clerics took over the work being done there.⁶¹ This had effectively been the original concept at the Northern Qi site of Xiangtangshan as well, where passages from representative works of the twelve divisions of the canon were inscribed.⁶²

⁵⁹Art Museum of Dazu Stone Carvings of Chongqing and the Institute of Dazu Stone Carvings Art of Sichuan Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, *“Dazu Baodingshan Xiao fo wan zu shi fa shen jing mu ta kan cha bao gao”* (“An Investigation of the Pagoda with Founder Figures of a Buddhist Sect and Buddhist Sutras List inscribed at Little Buddha Bend in Baoding Mount of Dazu County”), *Wen wu* no. 2 (1994): 8, 26-37.

⁶⁰Ledderose, 13. According to Soothill, 44a, the twelve divisions of the canon are comprised of 1) *sutras* or the sermons of the Buddha; 2) *geya*, prosimetric pieces; 3) *gatha*, chants or poems; 4) *nidana*, sutras written because of a request or because certain precepts were violated; 5) *itivrtka*, or narratives; 6) *jataka*, stories of former lives of the Buddha; 7) *abhidharma*, *sastra* or tracts on Buddhist philosophy or metaphysics (Soothill, 288b); 8) *avadana*, or parables; 9) *upadesa*, discourses by question and answer; 10) *udana*, impromptu or unsolicited addresses; 11) *vaipulya*, or expanded *sutras*; 12) *vyakarana*, prophecies.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 14.

⁶²Mino, 158. Mino, 158, footnote 9, quotes Akira Hirakawa as tracing the twelve divisions back to the Sarvastivadin tradition. The laity was also familiar with the importance of the twelve divisions of the canon, as demonstrated in these comments provided by the famous 8th-century poet Bo Juyi, “I have heard that the power of one earnest wish and the

At Baodingshan as at Wofo Yuan, the sutras found inscribed within the site are also listed in the sutra catalogue. Although some of the titles of the works directly correlate to modern-day identifications of the narrative tableaux, such as the Scripture on the Visualization of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, others point to the possibility of the text and imagery of the tableaux being pieced together from various known and revered scriptures. For example, there is no listing for the Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness, but there are several specific works listed related to the vignettes found within this tableau.⁶³ These include The Scripture on the Causal Grounds for the Pious Act of Sacrificing One's Body to Aid a Hungry Tiger, The Scripture on the Causal Grounds with regard to Prince Samaka's Filial Conduct, and The Parrot Scripture.⁶⁴

Several of the scriptures listed in the sutra catalogue make mention of mothers, but only the Scripture on the Difficulty in Repaying the Kindness of Parents can be said to relate specifically to the texts and images at Great Buddha Bend. Vis-à-vis hell and the Ten Kings, several cited works revolve around Mulian, the bodhisattva who is largely credited with helping create the Ghost Festival; also cited are a number of works related to the hungry

merit of (reciting) one verse will never be lost; how much greater then is the merit accruing from a thousand mouths uttering the twelve divisions of the canon? Moreover, how much greater also when hundreds of thousands of ears are listening to myriads of *sutras*?" See Peter N. Gregory, "The Teaching of Men and Gods: The Doctrinal and Social Basis of Lay Buddhist Practice in the Hua-yen Tradition," in Robert M. Gimello and Peter N. Gregory, ed., Studies in Ch'an and Hua-yen (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1984): 292-293.

⁶³It must be noted that areas of the sutra catalogue are no longer legible, so the possibility does exist that some of the missing titles were once included but are no longer extant.

⁶⁴DZSKMWL, 172-174.

ghosts.⁶⁵ Moreover, there are works listed directed at both monk and nun, as well as at men and women of the laity.⁶⁶

It is clear from the sutra catalogue that Zhao was fully aware of a large variety of texts. His decision to inscribe certain texts more fully within the confines of Great Buddha Bend can be seen to reflect his beliefs that these texts were necessary for the continuation of the Buddhist *dharma* as a whole. As Mino notes, "The preservation of specific *sutras* or passages of scripture in monumental form indicates that they were an established part of a canon and that an important process of selection and editing had already been undertaken...."⁶⁷ It is interesting that Zhao's selection of texts to portray and inscribe within the grotto represents a cross-section of beliefs, related to both the individual as well as the family, presenting the possibilities for the future by relying on examples from the past. Zhao in essence chooses to exalt a number of texts that in previous eras would have been considered secondary works, almost all of them apocryphal or local works, rather than inscribe the better-known texts that could accompany the Huayan triad or the Vairocana imagery.⁶⁸ Perhaps Zhao was aware of these texts being inscribed elsewhere, or chose texts he felt would best serve his congregation in the turbulent times to come.

⁶⁵Ibid., 174 -176 and 183.

⁶⁶Sutras related to the iconic imagery found within Great Buddha Bend are also included in the catalogue, such as numerous scriptures related to the worship of 1000-Armed Guanyin and the Peacock King (DZSKMWL, 174), as well as the Eight Guardians, the Ten Radiant Kings, and Vairocana.

⁶⁷Mino, 199.

Rock/Paper

While no factual data exists linking Zhao Zhifeng's inscribing of vast quantities of sutras at Baodingshan to the impending takeover by the Mongols and fears of “*mofa*”, the presence of the sutra catalogue combined with the increasingly chaotic state of affairs in Sichuan point to an effort by Zhao to try to preserve in stone what could all too easily have been destroyed were it constructed of plaster or paper. It was known already by the late 11th-century that the nomadic interlopers were likely to leave stone inscriptions found at Buddhist sites untouched, while pursuing a definite find-and-destroy agenda with regard to similar works placed in Chinese government offices or on private property.⁶⁹

The carving of scriptural texts with the intent of preserving the Buddhist teachings appears to have fallen by the wayside in favor of commemorative carvings during the late Tang and subsequent Song eras, yet one cannot conclude that this was a blanket reality throughout the empire.⁷⁰ Even though woodblock printing rose to be the dominant means of textual production after the tenth century, it did not subsume stone inscription carving, but rather the two continued along parallel lines of existence.⁷¹

⁶⁸Mino notes that within Cave I within the Southern Group at Xiangtangshan almost the entire text of the *Huayan jing* is inscribed. Ibid., 175. No text accompanies the imagery related to the Huayan sutra at Baodingshan.

⁶⁹Halperin, 25, quoting from writings of the Song official Ceng Gong (1019-1083 CE).

⁷⁰Halperin, 24.

⁷¹Carter, 24.

Moreover, Zhao Zhifeng may have been trying to evoke earlier times by utilizing the rock-cut tradition that had so effectively preserved the Buddhist faith at nearby Wofo Yuan through the difficult times of the late Tang dynasty. Philosophical considerations on a variety of levels may have been key to the texts being etched permanently in stone. On one level, the texts embody not just the Buddha's teachings, but the Buddha himself. On another, preservation of the faith in all its forms was of paramount concern for the monastic community. How best to do so was up to the discretion of the individual in charge of Baodingshan's construction, but arguably Zhao Zhifeng had to have seen with his own eyes the effective means by which works from the Tang dynasty at nearby Wofo Yuan had survived the devastation of internal Buddhist persecutions. Nearby stone cliff carvings remained, while wooden temples dating to the same period did not fare as well. In a time similarly rife with calamity and chaos, the late Tang dynasty Master Liu had pledged to aid all sentient beings.⁷² Following in the footsteps of his spiritual master, Zhao likewise dedicated the creation of Baodingshan to "freeing the surrounding countryside from calamity, and bringing harmony to the region."⁷³ The eternal quality of stone was a factor surely not lost upon Great Buddha Bend's designers.

As was the case at Fangshan, Xiangtangshan and Wofo Yuan, Zhao did not set out to inscribe the entire Buddhist canon in stone. One could view the textual images of Great Buddha Bend as his choice of representative

⁷²DZSKMWL, 207.

works from the twelve-divisions of the canon. It has often been noted that the site is eclectic in its spiritual program, an effect perhaps due to Zhao's desire to incorporate very disparate elements from the Buddhist faith into one faith-preserving site.

Textual imagery as described by Levering involves the texts themselves actually functioning in all four modes of reception at the same time, existing as "dimensions of the same reality".⁷⁴ The deep connection between the symbolic mode and the other three modes is obvious when it is deconstructed. The scripture becomes a symbol of the transcendent, an icon of the sacred, *because* of the ways in which it is used. "Thus symbolic reception depends upon the other modes of reception, and vice versa."⁷⁵ In this regard, one could also then view the presence of sculpted imagery at Great Buddha Bend as serving to solidify the presence of the textual imagery at the site, the use of the sculpted imagery aiding the faithful in eventually arriving at an understanding of the true importance of the nearby textual works. Had he wanted to spread the Buddhist faith, Zhao Zhifeng could have mass-produced works more quickly and efficiently in woodblock print. Instead, his decision to inscribe large portions of text as part of the imagery found carved in stone at Great Buddha Bend makes it evident that the turmoil of the times was prompting just as much of an effort at textual preservation as

⁷³*Dazu xian zhi*, 499.

⁷⁴Levering, 63.

⁷⁵Levering, 87. The importance of textual imagery continues into the present-day as witnessed by Levering in her research at Taiwanese Buddhist monasteries and convents. Within each of these communities, a copy of the *Da zang jing*, or complete Buddhist writings, was kept as a precious possession, rarely if ever used, its importance largely symbolic.

at edification. Clearly, depending upon one's level of education and enlightenment, the narrative reliefs at Baodingshan functioned in a multivalent fashion.